

Vicksburg National Military Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Vicksburg National Military Park



Glimpses of the African-American Experience



Carter G. Woodson

Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950) was born to parents who had been slaves. Neither his Mother nor Father could read or write. Mr. Woodson had to work to earn money for the family and did not start school until later than most children. But, his motto was, "it is never too late to learn." He became a high school teacher, and was sad to discover that none of the schools taught the history of black Americans. He started the Association of the Study of Negro Life and History to study the important things black people had accomplished and on February 19, 1926, Woodson established "Negro History Week," which is now called Black History Month in the United States. Black History Month is a time to learn about black history, to acknowledge that we live in a multicultural America and is a redress of historical wrongs.

Black History Month

Woodson chose the second week of February for Negro History Week because it marked the birthdays of two men who greatly impacted the black American population, Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.

The Association today has the same three goals as it had when it was founded:

- 1) To promote appreciation of the life and history of the Black American.
- 2) To encourage an understanding of the present status.
- 3) To enrich the promise of the future.



Hiram R. Revels

Hiram R. Revels (1822-1901) was born a free man in the slave state of North Carolina. Apprenticed as a barber at age 16, Hiram stayed until 1844, when he became a student at the Quaker school in Liberty, IN. To further his education, he attended school in Ohio and Knox College in Galesburg, IL. Ordained as a minister of the African Methodist Church in 1845, he ministered to congregations in several states. With the outbreak of the Civil War, Revels turned his resources toward support for the Union cause, aiding in the organization of African-American regiments. He served in Vicksburg, MS as chaplain of a Negro regiment, and at one point was Provost Marshal in the city. After the war, Hiram settled in Natchez, MS where he was elected alderman. He went on to be the first African-American member of the US Senate, serving until March 1871. Returning to Mississippi, he was named president of Alcorn College, the State's first college for African-American students, retiring in 1882. Earning the respect of both whites and blacks, Hiram Revels dedicated his life to improving the spiritual and educational needs of the African-American community.

Pinckney Benton Stewart (Pinchback) (1837-1921) was one of 10 children born to a white Mississippi planter and former slave freed before the boy's birth. Fearing re-enslavement after the planter's death, the family fled to Ohio, where Pinchback found work as a cabin boy, then steward on craft plying the Mississippi, Missouri and Red Rivers. After war broke out in 1861, he ran the Confederate blockade on the Mississippi to reach Federally-held New Orleans. There he raised a company of black volunteers for the Union, called the Corps d'Afrique, but resigned his captain's commission after encountering racism. In 1868, Pinchback was elected to the Louisiana State Senate and named its president *pro tempore*. He became Lt. Governor upon the death of the incumbent, and Acting Governor during impeachment proceedings against Henry Clay Warmoth. Elected to the U.S. Congress in 1872, then Senate in 1873, he was refused both seats, ostensibly for election fraud, but most likely for his color. His last office was as surveyor of customs in New Orleans in 1882. Disillusioned with the outcome of Reconstruction, Pinchback moved to Washington, D.C., remaining active in politics for the remainder of his life.



Pinckney Benton Stewart (Pinchback)

Capt. Charles Young (1864-1922) was born to former slaves in Kentucky. Moving with his family across the river to Ripley, OH, Young attended the white high school and graduated at the age of 16, the first black to graduate with honors. He then taught school in the black high school in Ripley, during which time he had an opportunity to enter a competitive examination for appointment as a cadet at West Point. With the second highest score, Young reported to the military academy in 1883, and was the third black man to graduate with his commission. Assigned to the 10th and 7th Cavalry, he was promoted to 1st Lieutenant. In 1903, he was appointed acting superintendent of Sequoia and General Grant National Parks, becoming the first black superintendent of a national park. His greatest impact involved road construction helping to improve the underdeveloped park. Through his work ethic and perseverance, Young's troops accomplished more in one summer than had been done in three years. Conquering a world of obstacles in his path, he became the first black to attain the rank of lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army. Young died in 1922, while detailed in Nigeria, and given a hero's burial in Arlington National Cemetery.



Capt. Charles Young

"I Have A Dream" Martin Luther King, Jr., August 28, 1963



Thurgood
Marshall

"Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity."

May 17, 1954 - The Supreme Court rules on the landmark case Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kans., unanimously agreeing that segregation in public schools is unconstitutional. The ruling paves the way for large-scale desegregation, and is a victory for NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall, who will later return to the Supreme Court as the nation's first black justice.

December 1, 1955 - NAACP member Rosa Parks refuses to give up her bus seat to a white passenger, defying a southern custom of the time. In response to her arrest, the Montgomery, AL black community launches a bus boycott, which will last for more than a year, until the buses are desegregated December 21, 1956. Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. is instrumental in leading the boycott.

"I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream."

June 12, 1963 - Mississippi's NAACP field secretary, 37-year-old Medgar Evers, is murdered outside his home. After two trials in 1964, resulting in hung juries, Byron De La Beckwith is convicted for murdering Evers thirty years later.

September 1957 - Formerly all-white Central High School in Little Rock, AR, learns that integration is easier said than done. Nine black students are blocked from entering the school by crowds organized by Governor Orval Faubus. President Eisenhower sends federal troops and the National Guard to intervene on behalf of the students.

May 4, 1961 - The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) begins sending student volunteers on bus trips to test the implementation of new laws prohibiting segregation in interstate travel facilities. One of the first two groups of "freedom riders," as they are called, encounters its first problem two weeks later, when a mob in Alabama sets the riders' bus on fire. The program continues, and by the end of the summer 1,000 volunteers, black and white, have participated.

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.'"

August 28, 1963 - About 250,000 people join the March on Washington. Congregating at the Lincoln Memorial participants listen as Reverend King delivers his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

August 10, 1965 - Congress passes the Voting Rights Act of 1965, making it easier for Southern blacks to register to vote. Literacy tests and other such

requirements that tended to restrict black voting become illegal.

July 2, 1964 - President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964, making segregation in public facilities and discrimination in employment illegal.

February 21, 1965 - Malcolm X, black nationalist and founder of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, is shot to death in Harlem. It is believed the assailants are members of the Black Muslim faith, which Malcolm had recently abandoned.

"I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

April 4, 1968 - Reverend King, at age 39, is shot as he stands on the balcony outside his hotel room in Memphis, TN. Although escaped convict, James Earl Ray, later pleads guilty to the crime, question about the actual circumstances of King's assassination remain to this day.

April 11, 1968 - President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968, prohibiting discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing.

March 22, 1988 - Overriding President Reagan's veto, Congress passes the Civil Rights Restoration Act, which expands the reach of non-discrimination laws within private institutions receiving federal funds.

November 22, 1991 - After two years of debates, vetoes, and threatened vetoes, President Bush reverses himself and signs the Civil Rights Act of 1991, strengthening existing civil rights laws and providing for damages in cases of intentional employment discrimination.

"From every mountainside, let freedom ring."

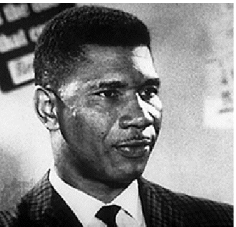
It can be easy to forget that at the center of the many debates, protests, legal battles, and compromises are people looking to enjoy ordinary lives and opportunities considered the birthright of every American - people like ourselves. Another thing easily forgotten is that blacks have not always relied on the courts or on people in power to help them. Many times and in many ways, blacks established organizations to help themselves. Black churches, schools, banks - even black national conventions - have existed since early Colonial times.

The civil rights of blacks are now guaranteed by law. But because opportunities for blacks have become available in American society only in more recent times, blacks are often the first to suffer during hard times when opportunities and money are short. In addition, nearly a third of all blacks live in poverty.

And so the struggle goes on - a struggle that we should recognize is not only for improvements for blacks or other individual minority groups, but for the improvement of all of America.



Rosa Parks



Medgar
Evers



Martin
Luther
King, Jr.



Malcolm X